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SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR JWOOD
OSD FOR MSHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CJTF-82 AND POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENT, SECURITY KEY THEMES IN AMBASSADOR'S
VISIT TO KHOST PROVINCE

REF: KABUL 3724

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Development and security were the key themes brought up in conversations with local officials during the Ambassador's October 29 visit to Khost Province. In meetings with the Provincial Governor, Provincial Council and university students, Ambassador underscored the U.S. respect for Islam and U.S. commitment to working in partnership with Afghan institutions to address security issues and encourage development. He answered students' questions about U.S. intentions in Afghanistan. Khost MPs who met with the Ambassador in Kabul prior to the trip highlighted their concern over a disconnect between the government and the people. End Summary.

Provincial Officials Highlight Security Concerns

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met with Provincial Governor Arsala Jamal and members of the Provincial Council (PC) during his October 29 visit to Khost Province. The Governor and PC members spoke at length about the close cooperation they had with the U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Khost. They reported that security had improved in the province since the PRT began operations but underlined it remains a concern. They stressed the importance of military forces respecting Islam as they carry out operations. Provincial Council chairman Dawood Khan Shaheedzoi cited the need for close cooperation between U.S. and Afghan security forces and the community in order to avoid misunderstandings and errors. He claimed that two local residents had been arrested based on false intelligence. He also complained about a former Taliban commander accepted into the Program Takh-i-Sol (PTS, the reconciliation program) having been subsequently arrested. Governor Jamal broached the subject of raising security personnel from among local tribes and paying them from national funds according to national doctrine as a way to strengthen community policing efforts.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador underscored the U.S. commitment to PTS, saying that it was vital that Taliban who want to return to a decent, peaceful life should be able to do so. He also stressed

the importance monitoring and, if need be, enforcement to ensure that reconciles meet their obligations to the community. Ambassador said the U.S. is committed to working in partnership with Afghan authorities, saying this is the way to produce the optimum political and security outcome in all our operations. He underlined U.S. respect for Islam. He offered condolences for the death of a PC member, due to a heart attack, following the October 25 suicide attack on a PRT convoy in which the Governor and the PC member were passengers.

Development Also a Priority

¶4. (SBU) Governor Jamal and the PC members highlighted the importance of development to the Province. They said the Khost-Gardez road remained the main priority for the region, as it would mean more mobility of people and goods. Hospitals, electricity, agriculture projects, infrastructure, and trade development were also on their wish list. The Khost-Gardez road issue was also raised at a press conference during the visit. The Ambassador committed to an effort to keep the Khost-Gardez pass free of snow over the winter and said that U.S.-funded construction and paving efforts would begin in spring 2008. Ambassador highlighted in each meeting that more assistance was going to Khost Province during the current year than had been provided in the five previous years.

SPIRITED DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador also met with a group of Khost

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University and area madrassa students who asked questions about the U.S. view of Islam, the links between 9/11 and the U.S. decision to attack the Taliban, and U.S. long-term interests in Afghanistan. The Ambassador underlined U.S. respect for Islam and religious education, adding that students should be able to study and teachers should be able to teach whatever subjects they chose. He noted that the U.S. had been involved in development in Afghanistan for decades, but it was Al-Qai'da's use of Afghanistan as a base to attack the U.S. that had been the basis for a decision to reestablish a presence. The U.S. is committed to a long-term partnership with Afghanistan, supporting security and development.

KHOST MPs HIGHLIGHT GOVERNMENT'S DISCONNECT AND PRAISE PRT

¶6. (SBU) During their meeting in Kabul with the Ambassador two days before his trip to the province, Khost MPs expressed concern over what they described as a growing disconnect between the government and the people. They also underlined the need for security forces to work with local leaders during operations to avoid errors and undermining confidence in the efforts. MP Liaquatullah Babakrakhial claimed there had been several recent instances of what he described as mistaken identity leading to improper arrests. The MPs also flagged concern over the lack of development. Amir Khan Sabri, MP on the Communication and Transportation Committee of the Wolesi Jirga, highlighted that there are no hospitals and little electricity in the province. (Note: In fact there is currently a main hospital in Khost that is functional; a new hospital project in the province will be funded via CERP.) MP Mawlawi Hanif Shah Hussaini and other MPs underscored the positive role played by the PRT in development in the province and welcomed further efforts.

WOOD